



## EDITORIAL

# ROAPE: looking back to move forward

This issue of the *Review of African Political Economy* marks a new and significant beginning, but one which, in many ways, is something of a return to ROAPE's origins half a century ago. It also reflects notable elements of the journal's subsequent evolution and continuing preoccupations. In addition to being the first of ROAPE's 50th anniversary year, this issue is the first to be produced in partnership with ScienceOpen, our new publishing platform (Jasini 2023; ROAPE EWG 2023a). ROAPE now returns to independent publishing as part of 'a revolutionary new beginning' (Lawrence 2023b), while remaining solidly anchored in the journal's founding ethos of radical left scholarship and activism (ROAPE EWG 2023b). Issue 181 of the journal will be devoted to a celebration of ROAPE's first 50 years of existence and an assessment of its impact. It will also reflect on its future direction and prospects. Consequently, this editorial serves as something of a prelude to highlight the various ways in which the contributions making up the issue provide ongoing reassurance that textual and other forms of activism in and by ROAPE continue to consolidate and diversify in interesting, productive and impactful ways both in print and online (Cline-Cole and Littlejohn 2014).

But to begin, a recap of – and justification for – ROAPE's seemingly 'back to the future' publication strategy and a reminder that this, like all strategic decision-making, is solidly anchored in the journal's founding – and operating – ethos. Peter Lawrence's (2023b) recollections of ROAPE's beginnings, early struggles and ongoing challenges offer an important primer. He makes it clear that while knowledge production was always at the centre of ROAPE's intention to promote a radical political economy in and on Africa, actual dissemination of this knowledge represented a challenging proposition. As he reminds us, increasing production and distribution costs, alongside a steadily increasing demand for more labour power than even committed founder-activist intellectuals and employed workers could continue to provide gratis or at the risk of intensified self-exploitation, made for an increasingly precarious first half of the journal's existence. Undoubtedly, too, as he is at pains to explain, contracting out production of the print journal in 1999 to Carfax (and, subsequently, via acquisitions and mergers amid a far-reaching restructuring of the global publication industry, to Taylor & Francis) was clearly a considered response to a very real existential crisis. It was not a response entirely of what had by this time emerged as the cooperative ROAPE Publications' own choosing. Nonetheless, in the years since, but particularly during the Taylor & Francis era, the ROAPE Collective in pursuit of the journal's

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remit has been able to take advantage of its relationship with the corporate publishing giant for both subversive and progressive ends (ROAPE EWG 2023b).

Promoting and documenting radical transformation in Africa during this period of transactional alliance has taken place in a context of editorial autonomy, expanded readership and greater financial security for the journal and, with it, the opportunity to combine knowledge production and activist praxis in both intensified and expanded ways. Roape.net, our now 10-year-old online platform,<sup>1</sup> expands ROAPE's presence and reach well beyond the print journal, which it both complements and extends, in addition to maintaining a vibrant 'real-time' (semi-)autonomous existence – see, for example, its campaigns and video sections.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, 'Connecting people and voices for radical change in Africa' (Zeilig, Chukwudimma, and Radley 2023) became a regular section in the print journal aiming 'to give readers ... a picture of what has been published on Roape.net over the last few months, and invit[ing them] to connect and follow the articles, blogposts, authors and debates online'.

Fittingly, then, the news that ROAPE was to return to independent publishing was released via Roape.net, where it has attracted much interest as well as expressions of solidarity, including subscriptions and donations. Such solidarity is as heartening and reassuring as it is symbolically significant and materially invaluable. But – just like the Connections workshops identified as a significant recent ROAPE initiative by one of the Collective's founders (Lawrence 2023b) – it is also revolutionary in its liberating intent. Central to the realisation of this shared intent has been, once again, the combined and increasingly integrated roles of the print journal and Roape.net. Held in Accra (November 2017), Dar es Salaam (April 2018) and Johannesburg (November 2018), the ROAPE Connections workshops aimed primarily to 'bring together left activists and intellectuals in debate and consideration of the potential for radical socioeconomic transformation and engagement *in the continent*', but also 'to open up a discussion about widening and diversifying audiences for a journal like ROAPE in Africa and doing this [while also] convert[ing] audiences into partners' (Bujra 2019; emphasis added).

In the event, reflections on (Bujra, Mgumia, and Zeilig 2018; Bush, Graham, and Zeilig 2018; Dwyer 2019), and associated reports of (Bujra et al. 2018; Bush et al. 2018; Dwyer et al. 2019) the workshops convey a sense of the contested nature and varied complexities inherent in the practical politics of knowledge generation and activist praxis. But they speak also of a certain excitement and/or anticipation, seemingly tinged with trepidation, as iterative processes of *negotiating* connections for radical change evolved and outcomes of *co-producing* mutually rewarding partnerships between activists and activist scholars emerged, often slowly and fitfully (Bujra 2019; Dwyer 2019). Rising to the challenge of forging meaningful alliances in this way elicited much introspection among workshop participants of varying social identities and self-representations. But although race, age, gender, occupation and origin/geography/location emerged as significant axes of differentiation, they also represented individual and group identity characteristics which mediate the lived/shared histories and contemporary experiences of imperialist oppression and capitalist exploitation. Potentially, therefore, they constitute the basis also for a shared consciousness around the case for radical transformation, as well as the means – protest, resistance, solidarity and mobilisation – for achieving social and political change of this kind.

Nonetheless, *connecting with* the complex and dynamic everyday realities within which multi-generational activist colleagues operated via the Connections workshops

proved anything but straightforward. This was a timely and sobering, if entirely predictable, reminder of how power struggles are integral to social mobilisation. But it also seemingly provided support for the sentiment, shared by several members of the ROAPE Collective prior to the workshops, that ‘the journal had in some sense “lost its way” [and] needed to reconnect with old comrades across the continent and make new connections in order to become more embedded in the ways (new and old) that it once was’ (Dwyer 2019, 633–634). And yet, justifying the very existence of the workshops on the grounds of a ROAPE disconnect required, at the very least, the equivalent of a shared or common language encompassing all those variously involved in the struggle for a radically transformed Africa. Hence the absolute necessity for a ‘common language of struggle and activism’ (Dwyer 2019) or ‘radical message and vocabulary’ (Bujra 2019): one that would ultimately take the form of ‘open dialogue’ to stimulate ‘a genuinely collaborative effort, locally embedded but also responding to [politically engaged] local and international debates ... on how to provoke social transformation [while] avoid[ing] sectarianism’ (Bujra 2019).

In the event, and arguably *because of* rather than despite productive tensions, creative dialogue and imaginative message delivery, assessments of the impact of ROAPE Connections have thus far been overwhelmingly positive and encouraging, and not only or even primarily from a (global core or metropolitan academic) ROAPE perspective (Roape Online 2019; Roape.net 2019). Thus, African activists and activist scholars have subsequently sought to build on the momentum created by ROAPE Connections by organising their own follow-up workshops independently of (but in at least one case partly funded by) ROAPE (Dwyer 2019). At the same time, ROAPE itself has been involved in discussions about how best to capitalise on and create new opportunities for strengthening and expanding these links and connections.

Not surprisingly, political economy in both theory and practice dominated all aspects of the workshops including, above all perhaps, the varied interactions between ROAPE and its interlocutors and comrades, captured to varying degrees in and by the workshop reporting and commentary mentioned earlier. After all, ongoing *reconnection* with our historical (and, hopefully, expanding) contemporary constituency depended heavily, as Peter Dwyer (2019) so perceptively put it, not just on ‘knowing who we are’, but also on being reminded of the existence of actual limits to the realisation of the transformative potential and aspirations of a small, albeit well-meaning and fully committed radical and activist, academic journal based in the global North, notably in support of (particularly young) African scholar-activists on the ground. Communicating all this accurately and convincingly *to a wider and absent* ROAPE audience became therefore as big and as formidable an academic and political challenge as the task of negotiating mutually intelligible language and vocabulary for in-person deliberations during the respective workshops. Here, the Roape.net online platform demonstrated its value yet again, offering complementary and alternative ‘real-time’ audio, video and social media dissemination formats to go with ROAPE’s standard quarterly text and print journal output, thereby diversifying both message and target audience, as well as expanding the journal’s reach and, hopefully, transformative influence.

Nor does the foregoing exhaust the alliances or connections forged by ROAPE in pursuit of radical change in Africa during the last quarter century. Thus, it was naturally Roape.net that we opted for when publicly *restating* our steadfast solidarity with Palestine (ROAPE EWG 2023c), and where we continue to provide a forum for spirited exchange between our contributors and readership, as well as a supportive platform for committed

intellectual and other forms of activism which continue to animate a ROAPE Collective and readership united *against* colonisation and imperialism and resolutely *for* liberation of the colonised, notably those who continue to bear the brunt of the costs of social and societal reproduction under occupation.<sup>3</sup> And it is to this platform, among others, that we would direct those who remain perplexed by, and continue to require an explanation for, South Africa's leadership role in resisting and protesting Israeli occupation, most recently by instituting proceedings of genocidal acts of omission and commission by Israel in Gaza with the International Court of Justice at The Hague (ICJ 2023; Holligan and Slow 2024). Also, while both the print journal and Roape.net naturally carry details of a variety of additional initiatives such as bursaries, internships, prizes and competitions to connect more meaningfully with our wider constituency, we actively encourage our audience to make the most of Roape.net for accompanying interviews, spotlights, blogposts and so forth which breathe life into the personalities of award recipients and prize-winners, for example, as well as their frequently inspiring stories, in ways which static text on a page, no matter how long the read (and, yes, there are long reads on offer on Roape.net too), is rarely capable of capturing in all their multidimensionality.

Thus, the forms of knowledge production and dissemination negotiated during Connections, which are both described in detail (Bujra 2019) and justified at length (Dwyer 2019), become both a logical extension of such a multi-media approach to activist academic publishing, and a reinforcing of an ongoing *de facto* strategy of textual and related resistance, protest and mobilisation by the journal. Indeed, contacts initially established via any number of such interactions have often developed into lasting relationships with the journal. New (and old) acquaintances become (often regular) contributing authors and reviewers, for instance, and/or recruits to the Editorial Working Group and International Advisory Board, or as Contributing Editors, as we actively seek on an ongoing basis to renew, expand and diversify membership of the Collective. This is not only to ensure institutional survival and reproduction; it is also, equally importantly, a major tenet of radical, representative and progressive politics.

Always central to ROAPE's existence, founding ethos and mission, radical and progressive politics continues to be key to the journal's expanding and intensifying connections at all levels (often well) beyond Connections. And, as a key component of ROAPE's emergence and increasing consolidation as a journal with multi-media output, Roape.net has proved invaluable in extending and diversifying the journal's reach and impact. That this has happened while the print journal was being published by Taylor & Francis, a leading global academic publisher with a stable of more than 2700 academic journals and a huge online presence of its own, is significant (Taylor & Francis n.d.), for it partly reflects support for ROAPE initiatives like Connections and Roape.net from Taylor & Francis.

However, this interaction, while undoubtedly mutually beneficial, has in practice been ultimately transactional, driven by the pursuit, separate but interlinked, of institutional survival, on the one hand, and profit, on the other. Always first and foremost an alliance of convenience, there was little in the way of shared politics or common ideological beliefs, but recognition of the need for a negotiated capacity, albeit under constant review, for mutual accommodation. In the event, such a capacity would be sorely in demand during ROAPE's internal deliberations over the initial transition from independent to commercial publishing and its immediate aftermath during the 1990s and early 2000s. Negotiations over a change this radical were unlikely ever to be straightforward or, as it transpired,

without potential risk to unity and cohesion in the Collective. After all, the proposed change did not just represent a seeming potential threat to the integrity of our founding ethos and operating principles. It would also require major restructuring of internal working practices and relationships. And of course, all this needed to be achieved without sacrificing collective responsibility and decision-making or, arguably worse still, risking the journal becoming irretrievably enmeshed in overt ‘comprador’ networks and roles. Put differently, the existential crisis confronting ROAPE was considerably more than the purely material; it was also about its very identity, its *raison d’être*. There was a largely unspoken assumption that commercial publishing would be an open-ended, stop-gap measure, not a permanent solution.

In the event, pressure from contradictory beliefs and competing interests resulted in group cohesion being subject to undue stress during what was, by any estimation, a period of major upheaval. Given how high the stakes were, however, it was not entirely surprising, if regrettable, that exchanges were often heated and encounters occasionally bruising; lingering resentment combined with irreconcilable differences and (in/voluntary departures to leave scars which sometimes ran deep and, in the odd case, remain only partly healed. It was an experience which, for a then recent arrival like me, helped to instil beyond all doubt the primacy of the Collective and the importance attached to collective responsibility and shared decision-making, not only during turbulent times, but in all dealings with, and in, a new, uncertain and rapidly changing corporate world which, by definition, would be at odds with much of ROAPE’s ethos. ROAPE would weather this immediate crisis and even go on to thrive in the intervening years, becoming increasingly adept, as we have seen, at closely aligning its new status of relative influence and/or affluence with its long-term goal of ‘connecting people and voices for radical change in Africa’ (Bujra 2019). Investing in Roape.net as *our* window to *our* expanding and diversifying world emerges as strategic and forward-thinking. In short, that ROAPE was able to maintain an identifiably separate existence throughout from, first, Carfax and, subsequently, Taylor & Francis can be considered key to future-proofing the ROAPE brand and identity, while also securing its radical credentials and progressive reputation over the last 25 years. The prospect of a return to independent publishing would otherwise be a considerably more daunting proposition.

None of which is in any way to minimise the scale of the challenge ahead. On the contrary, it is to highlight the explicit and continuing – multi-layered and complex – role of politics and political economy in a still evolving story. Thus, for ROAPE, meaningful connections and alliances of various kinds are routinely forged or rekindled during (potentially) transformative encounters (Bush, Graham, and Zeilig 2018); participants in such shared encounters learn much about, and are active in, elaborating strategies for, and/or mechanisms of, social mobilisation in ways which reinforce transcontinental activism and solidarity (Dwyer 2019); and audiences or observers at these encounters become converts to active partnerships in a common struggle against the (particularly local) ravages of imperialism and capitalism (Bujra 2019). In truth, however, even though this all refers *specifically* to Connections-related encounters and their outcomes, the observations could be said to be equally true of ROAPE-sponsored events *in general*, and for most of the journal’s existence, rather than just the period since 2017. By the same token, ROAPE’s ‘foundational call for meaningful connections at all levels – intellectual, social, and political’ (Bujra’s 2019) long predates Connections which, however, gave this potentially

transformative sentiment a much-deserved filip. Consequently, the Editorial Working Group came away from Connections encounters noticeably exhilarated, but also, and in equal measure, challenged and chastened. Connections was an output of, and contribution to, long-running conversations regarding ROAPE's immediate and long-term future going back to its founding: What was ROAPE (still) *for*? To *whose* ultimate benefit? And with *what* (lasting) impact/outcomes?

These questions have been constantly debated in a range of formats and fora both in-house and more widely, but they had become increasingly urgent in the wider context of the neoliberalisation of knowledge production and dissemination, and particularly the extensive restructuring of global commercial publishing which has been under way for practically the entire period the journal has been produced in collaboration with commercial publishers. In particular, and against a background of mergers, takeovers and oligopolistic market tendencies, Open Access (OA) based on article processing charges (APC) rather than journal subscriptions has emerged as the 'dominant' or 'de facto' (Dudley 2021) funding, and thus the profit generation model in global scholarly publishing over the last 20 or so years (Zhang et al. 2022).<sup>4</sup> And this, even though it continues to be justified for its reported 'potential to reduce global inequalities in access to scientific literature by removing paywalls' (Shu and Larivière 2024, 519). Ensuring maximum access to the journal for African authors, readers and institutions has always been a core part of ROAPE's mission. To this end, the EWG has always sought to expand, protect and/or guarantee such access, including negotiating subsidies, donations and other such 'concessions' as part of commercial contracts or agreements, sometimes partly funded from royalties.

Yet, the seemingly unstoppable shift to (ultimately fully) pay-to-publish OA threatens knowledge dissemination of this kind, as well as reinforcing existing global inequalities in knowledge production, even with the selective deployment of seemingly ameliorative measures like APC waivers by some of the largest OA publishers in order to counter the more pernicious of these effects (Frank, Foster, and Pagliari 2023; Shu and Larivière 2024). And, as Dudley (2021) has noted, '[o]ne ideal of the open access movement has been equal access to scholarly knowledge, but the increasing use of APCs has placed significant financial barriers in the path of independent scholars, those at smaller institutions, and academics in much of the developing world who would like, or need, to publish their work'. This would include a good representation of the authors, activists and scholar activists making up ROAPE's natural and/or targeted constituency, as the Connections workshops, for example, make abundantly clear. Yet, OA is also believed to encourage the proliferation of substandard and predatory journals and publishing (Frank, Foster, and Pagliari 2023), or, at the very least, exacerbate the latter's negative effects (Dudley 2021), further reinforcing global inequities in knowledge production (see also Anonymous 2021). And so, we have, as a direct consequence of ongoing global capitalist restructuring, another of those periodic major challenges to ROAPE in its quest to continue to promote and document radical transformation in Africa. Notably, the transition to pay-to-publish OA is one that Taylor & Francis, our erstwhile commercial publishers, are heavily invested in and committed to, and in which they have emerged, by their own and other's accounts, as market leaders (Shu and Larivière 2024; Taylor & Francis n.d.).

We do not believe that OA based on APC will be in either our narrow interest or to the long-term benefit of the wider community of activists and activist scholars we seek to support in their diverse struggles. Furthermore, pay-to-publish OA is not the only option

and, as Dudley (2021) rightly observes, ‘true open access should remove financial barriers to publish articles as well as to read them’, an option which is already being pursued by a significant (and possibly growing) number of journals using a variety of funding models (see also Blas, Rele, and Kennedy 2019). It is in the light of this and bearing in mind the importance of agency in struggles for social transformation, that ROAPE has opted to return to independent publishing as both a principled and pragmatic stance, and as an overt political statement. In practice, and as a not-for-profit collective dependent upon fundraising, subscriptions and donations, ROAPE has opted for a free-to-read and free-to-publish model based on a combination of individual and institutional subscriptions and donations (Subscribe to Open model, S2O). As a result, ‘all ROAPE’s work will be available on a single platform with no paywalls. There will be equal access for all researchers, activists, and readers, wherever they are based in the world, and for the foreseeable future’ (ROAPE EWG 2023b). The aim continues to be to provide a platform for African voices and perspectives (Cline-Cole and Lawrence 2021). We hope that, overall, this will also respond to calls during the Connections workshops for ‘more action, less talk’ (Bujra 2019). Yet, as both challenge and opportunity, the transition requires significant modification to existing labour processes and practices; the negotiation of more active roles for the International Advisory Board and Contributing Editors; and that we capitalise on the knowledge, expertise and technology used in developing Roape.net to even greater and more dramatic effect. But as always, success will depend also on the goodwill, commitment and support of comrades in the struggle all over the world, who can both subscribe and donate to the journal and its revolutionary project. Beyond our immediate and local concerns, we hope, too, that ROAPE’s new beginning will draw greater attention to, and closer engagement with no-pay OA initiatives, several of which have proved enduring and might amount to the beginnings of a ‘social movement’ (Frank, Foster, and Pagliari 2023). So, it is perhaps inevitable that the most important decision that ROAPE has had to take about its future in the last 30 years is one that involves direct participation in a wider ongoing struggle for social transformation.

## In this issue

The selection of four research articles, three debates and two briefings in this issue reflects something of the variety characterising textual engagement, already under way in the journal, with that struggle. Three of the pieces speak to questions of labour and nature exploitation (Pattenden; Del Panta and Lodi; Duffield and Stockton); a further two address knowledge production/dissemination (Ndlovu-Gatsheni; Dieng); while the final four cover the military in politics (Maringira), armed conflict/pastoral banditry (Ejiofor), state repression and organised/popular resistance (Plaut), and US security policy towards Africa (Volman), respectively. Between them the papers cover the continent’s main regions and diaspora and, taken together, represent important contributions to ROAPE’s long-running goals of advocating and documenting social or transformational change in Africa. The issue closes with a tribute to one of our founding editors, the late John S. Saul.

In the first article in this issue, Jonathan Pattenden focuses on direct and indirect forms of capitalist exploitation, highlighting exploitative relations of gender and class in the

context of neocolonialism in rural eastern Uganda. He sets out to understand and document the context, structures and, particularly, *processes* implicated in “direct” exploitation of labour by petty capital, “indirect” exploitation through petty commodity production, and the “triple exploitation” of working-class women’ in the village of Budumi, with a view to clarifying and challenging these concrete local manifestations of capitalism at work. His contribution brings a combination of sound theoretical grounding and analytical sophistication to bear on rich/detailed empirical material, in demonstrating how his study village’s ‘combination of pauperising forms of petty commodity production and scarce wage-labour reflect a broader crisis of simple reproduction under capitalism’. Thus, we have, for example, not just the identification of different types of labour and fractions of capital, but detailed and painstaking disaggregation and (re-)aggregation of processes and types of (often self-)exploitation, both vertical and horizontal, and the complicated, differentiated and dynamic forms they take. Yet it is, not surprisingly perhaps, the *ordinariness* or *pervasiveness* of such ‘everyday exploitation’ which captures the imagination most readily, a perspective no doubt sharpened and enlivened by using vignettes and biographies to bring struggles to life, whether for survival, immiseration or, more rarely, accumulation.

Yet while Pattenden demonstrates throughout how and why the incidence, mechanisms and rates of exploitation weigh particularly heavily on the poor(est), he is careful to remind us, too, that the exploitative local-level relations he examines are embedded in increasingly larger-scale and, ultimately, global capitalist relations. Indeed, as he quite rightly concludes, concrete village-level realities of gendered exploitation of the kind he undertakes are inextricably linked to ‘broader dynamics of appropriation and dispossession: the two are co-constituted, and so challenging either requires better understanding of both’. Pattenden’s text is an excellent reminder, alongside those of Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Dieng as we see later, of how and why knowledge production and dissemination – textual activism, in other words – can be so central to social struggles.

But it is to Gianni Del Panta and Lorenzo Lodi’s reflections on the limited workers’ rights and concessions won by Algeria’s labour movement in the wake of the 2019–2021 popular resistance (Hirak or Revolution of Smiles) that we turn next. Their paper makes valuable theoretical, methodological and analytical contributions to our understanding of labour activism and mobilisation, as well as broad and mass-based uprisings. This is textual (scholar-)activism, in that it is dependent largely on ‘a comprehensive set of media sources with different editorial lines and geographical foci, newspaper sources and a Facebook page’, seeking to document and account for strikes by organised labour as part of a popular uprising. The latter, in mobilising against autocratic rule, represented a considerable mass-based activism which was undoubtedly revolutionary, albeit only partly and/or directly textual in manifestation. Del Panta has argued elsewhere for scholarship to combine analyses of structure and process, in his case in developing nuanced insights on labour activism in autocratic contexts more generally (Del Panta 2022). Thus, the jointly authored contribution presented here is situated within just such a context of popular national uprisings, albeit specifically in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2007/08 and its aftermath. The long and complex origins of these uprisings have been well documented (Del Panta 2022) and provide the immediate and evolving background to the case argued here too. Del Panta and Lodi use their contribution to wrestle with the paradox alluded to in their title: how and why have workers whose protests were vital in



both initiating and supporting mass mobilisation, found themselves not only ‘no better off today’ than they were pre-Hirak, but are now also having to contend with more onerous legal requirements in the state sector or public service for expanding union activity, improving union rights and (in officially mandated strategic industries) organising strike action.

Del Pantà and Lodi’s compilation and analysis of a dataset on strikes organised by workers from March 2019 to October 2021 is original information which provides the basis for the ‘qualitative understanding’ of the incidence and outcome of the strikes which is the paper’s main aspiration. The strikes are identified and categorised according to ‘workplace, sector, geographical location, type, main claim and union that organised the strike’, and then analysed *in context* to highlight the variously complementary, contradictory and competing forces, interests and main actors in the social mobilisations in question, as well as the latter’s varied and differentiated outcomes. Above all, they reiterate the message that ‘[t]he context in which mass protests take place is not fixed’ (Del Pantà 2022, 540). In practice, therefore, the paper is a call for a political economy of labour movements which attends to how temporality, spatiality and politics intersect in place. By being cognisant of the significance of both changing class structure and a conceptualisation of ‘trade unions as actors in their own right ... seek[ing] to maximise their bargaining power’, the authors argue, the risk of ‘overlook[ing] conflicts that emerge between rank-and-file workers and union officials and between unionised and non-unionised parts of the working class’ is minimised or eliminated. Indeed, as the detailed interpretation of their dataset shows, the structures and dynamics of differentiation within and between components of the wider protest movement loom as large here in explaining the paper’s foundational paradox as they did in accounting for the pervasive inequality that we encountered earlier in Budumi. Moreover, as we have seen, the context in which either capitalist exploitation or mass protest is located is anything but fixed or unchanging (Del Pantà 2022).

The dynamic nature of context, class dynamics, forms of exploitation and protest – these are all themes which link the previous two papers to Promise Ejiofor’s study of pastoral banditry in northwest Nigeria. Using Hobsbawm’s well-known work on social banditry as his starting point, Ejiofor extends Hobsbawm’s original formulation in two ways: first, by overtly locating the case study within a ‘political economy of corruption and “accumulation by dispossession”’; and second, by applying this modified approach to an interpretation of sub-Saharan realities and complexities. He sets out to reinterpret existing information in advancing a largely theoretical and conceptual proposition. That is, that ‘pastoral banditry constitutes resistance to conjugated oppression axiomatic from the contradictions of the Nigerian political economy’ and can thus justifiably be conceived as a ‘social’ rather than ‘ordinary’ crime – as resistance to *longue durée* marginalisation and exploitation of pastoralists and pastoralism by sedentary groups. Thus, in a manner reminiscent of earlier contributions, Ejiofor devotes the bulk of the paper to documenting, often in detail, presumed evidence of the ‘social marginality, economic deprivation, and everyday abuses’ on which the case for his proposition rests. Much more so than Pattenden’s, say, and more in keeping with Del Pantà and Lodi’s, Ejiofor’s focus is noticeably regional and national, with particular attention to how realities and complexities at these scales, notably to do with sedentarisation/state building/agrarian capitalism and nomadism/immobilisation/pastoral subsistence, have both influenced and been affected by larger-scale processes like Islamisation, colonisation, neo-colonialism

and imperialism. But his is a paper which is also, and primarily, like Godfrey Maringira's on the Zimbabwe military, ethnic-, clan- and class-based, and which therefore privileges the mediation of access to and control over the forces and means of production, consumption and exchange by local and extra-local elites and ruling classes, as indeed does Pattenden.

Yet there is subtlety and clear-sightedness here too, alongside seeming certainty. Thus, pastoral banditry is born of a 'desire not so much to overturn the political order but to draw the state's attention to ... perceived unfair discrimination or exploitation'. At the same time, 'banditry in the northwest region is neither synonymous with pastoralism nor with Fulani communities', while pastoral banditry is '*misguided* violent protest' (emphasis added), albeit against deprivation, marginalisation and oppression. Ejiofor also insinuates that claims in support of, and justification for, the (worst) excesses of pastoral banditry can be self-serving and/or exaggerated, false or contradictory. He acknowledges that pastoral bandits 'are at one and the same time perpetrators and victims of a political economy of class exploitation'; that many of their victims are other pastoralists, frequently women and children; and, finally, that as 'reformers' rather than 'revolutionaries', 'it is hard to see how pastoral bandits ... can transform the existing social order of things without reproducing the very same systemic malaises that they repudiate.' For Ejiofor, as for Pattenden, then, resolving crises of exploitation, immiseration, marginalisation, deprivation and insecurity requires, among other interventions, expanding access to public goods and services, and confronting legacies of abuse, conflict and banditry. Somewhat reminiscently of Del Panta and Lodi's caution against analytically conflating (organised) labour and the working class, Ejiofor is keen to remind us that pastoral bandits aim specifically 'to fashion a state, economy, or society attuned to *their* subjective well-being' (emphasis added) rather than, as in the case of Algeria's Hirak or indeed Nigeria's own Boko Haram, to overthrow an entire 'dysfunctional structural system'. As we see later, Duffield and Stockton return to the subject of the vested interests which are served by such a system in the context of agro-pastoralism in the Sahel and Sudan where, as in north-west Nigeria, appropriation, dispossession, land grabbing and armed violence all loom particularly large.

In the run-up to the August 2023 Zimbabwe elections, President Mnangagwa was widely reported in the local and international media as noting that the public either routinely underestimated or was ignorant of Zimbabwe's status as a military/militarised state. This is not an accusation that can be levelled at the fourth and final research article in this issue by Godfrey Maringira. He subjects to critical scrutiny the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA)–Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) 'complex' to which Mnangagwa alludes, highlighting how the former sustains the latter in power. He pays particular attention to the history and contemporary evolution of this alliance, while also foregrounding the structures and processes which are integral to the elite bargaining or accommodation driving this complex, even incestuous relationship. Historically, Maringira shows, (liberation) politics spawned the (colonial) armed struggle and liberation forces and thus, eventually, the (post-liberation) ZNA. Thus, he argues, the ZNA and its role in the country's political economy is best understood in terms of these origins, history and politics. He suggests that, given this context, the institutions of the ZANU–PF government and ZNA are co-dependent: not only is ZANU–PF the 'political wing' of the military, but the latter is also in turn 'the power behind ZANU–PF'.

Consequently, ZNA as an institution has always been political and its senior personnel, particularly commanding officers, highly politicised. Indeed, as Maringira also notes, key posts in the ZANU–PF party and government are currently held by senior former and serving military officers.

There is plenty of detailed information in his contribution to both illustrate and buttress his core argument, with much of it based on first-hand experience and primary research. Information used is reported, interpreted and analysed with insight and conviction. The paper demonstrates the deliberate/conscious and ongoing (re)politicisation of (mostly new, young and junior) soldiers both in and outside their barracks, and remarks perceptively on the demoralising effect on rank-and-file officers, and the difficulty that such ‘barracks politics’ poses in separating the military from politics in contemporary Zimbabwe. Indeed, Maringira is convinced that military disengagement from politics is unlikely to ever be complete, given that ZANU–PF’s ‘continued existence as a governing party, guarantees the military’s economic interests’. He is undoubtedly right, too, in his belief that depoliticising the military is best understood as an ongoing challenge under constant review. Yet he is equally adamant that such elite accommodation contradicts the constitution, in addition to being undemocratic, oppressive, demoralising, exploitative, repressive and divisive. In short, too toxic to be allowed to go unchallenged, even at the risk of exacting intimidatory and violent retribution from security forces led by the army. This is a further example of textual activism in an autocratic context to complement Del Panta and Lodi’s Algerian case study, another instance of research and writing designed to resist or confront oppression and promote social transformation.

We include, in addition to the research articles, three important debates and two briefings. The first is a contribution by Mark Duffield and Nicholas Stockton. They expose the weakness and self-serving character of many analyses of the tumult in the Sahel and Sudan. They argue that the dominant explanations of crisis in Sudan and the broader Sahel that focus on environmental crisis, ethnic divisions and cruel militaries are at best misplaced and at worst self-serving, as well as being advanced by vested interests. Instead, they advocate the exploration of the structural underpinnings of crisis, the dominance of neoliberalism and the ways in which merchant capital and violence is reproduced in permanent war. They highlight how the agro-pastoral economy has been transformed, undermining reciprocity between ‘farmers and herders’ as livestock exports in the region have grown. They argue, moreover, that this transformation is internationally facilitated as a mode of appropriation driven by dispossessions and land grabbing.

In our second debate Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni examines what he calls 10 challenges in reconfiguring African Studies. In a powerful overview and critique of what are characterised as the ‘comfort zones’ of African Studies, Ndlovu-Gatsheni goes beyond the more familiar accounts of how African Studies may reproduce the coloniality of knowledge. He tries to edge the debate beyond the context of when and how African Studies emerged to repurpose it ‘for the service of African epistemic freedom’. In so doing he intends to provoke analysis to nudge forward a recalibration of African Studies. We hope our readership engages with Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s call to privilege voices of ‘African scholars’ and activists in their struggles against racism, enslavement, colonialism, imperialism and heteronormative patriarchal sexism.

The third debate reflects on a series of dialogues to recentre African feminism and feminist voices to liberate them from the often exclusive space of academia and the

policing therein. Rama Salla Dieng recounts interviews with 15 African feminist activists. She explores, among other things, the intersections of feminist activism and knowledge production, as well as solidarity and the dynamics of power in Africa and African diaspora. She examines how African feminists challenge structures of power and how feminist scholarship, and activism, can impact political economy. In doing this they show how African feminist mobilisation speaking truth to power is not new, although there is the continuing need to build bridges between feminist communities of scholar-activism, and to reach beyond academia.

Our two briefings illustrate contrasting examples of states seeking to extend their influence abroad through propaganda and repression, on the one hand, and imperial and commercial expansionism, on the other. Daniel Volman explores recent dynamics and funding for US security policy towards Africa in the first of these. It looks at President Biden's security budget for 2024 in the context of challenges to US supremacism and how Africa fits within US foreign policy. Volman argues that US security interests in Africa have evolved since the Bush administration's creation of Africom in 2008. There is now a commitment to send even more American weapons and expand Africom – United States Africa Command – with potentially disastrous consequences for Africa. Like its predecessors, this is a policy which is certain to be in/directly implicated in the nature and outcome of events and crises such as those outlined by Del Panta and Lodi, Ejiofor, and Duffield and Stockton in this issue.

In the second of the briefings, Martin Plaut analyses the role that Eritrean festivals play in diasporan culture and politics, and in foreign exchange capture for a beleaguered regime in Asmara. He argues that the Eritrean government relies heavily on its exile community around the world for political support and perhaps as much as one-third of its finances. He then explores how critics of the Eritrean government have tried to stop the festivals, leading to large-scale and often violent protest. There are echoes here of Maringira's Zimbabwe case study, notably the militarisation of the state by a once progressive liberation movement resorting to autocracy and repression in response to widespread opposition and popular resistance at home and abroad.

Finally, Peter Lawrence (2023a) pays tribute to a ROAPE founding editor, building on his short obituary published on Roape.net on 27 September, 'John Saul – A Complete Revolutionary Socialist'. At this time of renewal we remember and salute so many comrades, present, past and passed, who have been a part of ROAPE over the last half century.

We hope readers engage with all the interventions in the issue. More broadly, we look forward to your contributions in future issues of the journal and its online platform Roape.net. Yusuf Serunkuma, a frequent contributor to both the journal and Roape.net, challenges African (scholar-)activists and their allies to critically examine self-censorship in their research, writing and activism (2023). Similarly, an earlier editorial in the journal called attention to Ibrahim Abdullah's admonition for Africans to write their own histories (Cline-Cole and Lawrence 2021). These and others are recurrent themes which continue to be the subject of intense and sometimes acrimonious exchanges on Roape.net and elsewhere in the journal. Here, for example, Abdullah's main point resonates with the preoccupations of both Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Rama Salla Dieng; while Maringira and Ejiofor are self-reflective and critical in addressing questions of direct relevance to the marginalised, oppressed and exploited; whereas Pattenden, Del Panta and Lodi, Duffield and Stockton, Plaut, and Volman together tackle oppression, state repression,

injustice, dispossession, accumulation and resistance in ways designed to expose vested interests and challenge excesses of neoliberalism, global capitalism and imperialism. At the same time, and to return to the theme with which this editorial opened, celebrating our 50th anniversary is a good time to review and update ROAPE's history and to reflect on the journal's hopes and aspirations for the future, starting with a return to independent publishing. It is also an appropriate moment to encourage the continued active participation of our authors and readers in framing and co-producing the journal's ongoing and future stories.

## Notes

- 1 Roape.net is online at <https://roape.net/>.
- 2 These are found at <https://roape.net/campaigns/> and <https://roape.net/our-blog/videos/>, respectively.
- 3 For a list of blogposts and features on Roape.net commenting on Palestine, see <https://roape.net/?s=Palestine>.
- 4 Dudley (2021) explains that early support for Open Access (OA) among libraries and research funders was a reaction to prohibitively expensive journal subscription charges, an important source of income for publishers who, looking to replace this income source as it was perceived to come under increasing threat, opted for the article processing charges version of OA which allowed them to 'publish OA articles within existing pay-to-view [or subscription] journals' (*ibid.*, 7), thereby satisfying the requirement for OA from research funders while being able to continue to compete with fully OA publishers.

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